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MEMORANDUM FOR: Deputy Director (Research)

SUBJECT : Civilian Pilots for OXCART Operation

25X1A REFERENCE : [redacted] dated 9 November 1962

1. In reference, you have asked us to consider whether we still have and will have in the future a requirement for utilization of bona fide civilian pilots in the conduct of CIA overflights of denied territory.

2. If I may, I would like to recall to mind one of the more basic factors upon which political approval rested when IDEALIST overflights of the USSR were first begun in 1956. This was our ability to present to the highest political authority the means whereby this vital intelligence might be collected without placing the United States in a posture wherein the USSR, in this case, could accuse the United States of an act of military aggression. We had developed an operational entity which though ostensibly Air Force in character could, if a particular occasion required, be surfaced as a CIA controlled intelligence collection effort. Obviously, a very fundamental ingredient in achieving this capability was the irrefutable fact that the pilot who conducted this mission was a civilian in the employ of CIA.

3. It is my understanding that in the years since we began conducting covert overflights of denied territory that there has evolved in the minds of responsible political authorities an accepted modus operandi applicable to this type of activity. As I understand it, and frankly I know of no exception to it, that if the United States was not willing to acknowledge publicly the penetration of denied air space by military forces then that mission must be performed by the CIA. In June of this year, this policy was reaffirmed by USIB when CIA rather than the Air Force was charged with reconnaissance.

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in South China, North Viet Nam and Cuba. If, however, the United States was prepared to acknowledge a military act of intervention, as was the case in Cuba in October 1962, and earlier in Southeast Asia, then the overflights would be performed through utilization of military assets. The obvious case in point is the 1 May 1960 U-2 loss over the USSR. Though we can only make assumptions on the question of how the Soviets would have reacted if the pilot had been an Air Force officer, the fact is the pilot was Mr. Frank Powers, working for CIA, and the United States could candidly assert in the world forum that this was not an act of military aggression, but rather a civilian operated and controlled intelligence collection effort.

4. To my mind, this whole topic revolves mainly around the question of covert vs. overt operations, and the political ramifications that pertain to each type of operation. I firmly believe that once you inject the military element, i.e., an Air Force pilot, the operation is no longer a truly covert collection effort but rather a military operation which properly is conducted by the appropriate military element.

5. In the case of OXCART, unless there is a very fundamental change in existing national policy, it seems to me extremely unlikely that we would ever consider committing an Air Force pilot to this mission. However, should such a contingency arise, it is most probable that military pilots will eventually be trained to fly the A-12 aircraft and would, therefore, be available.

JAMES A. CUNNINGHAM, JR.
Acting Assistant Director
(Special Activities)

EO/OSA:RFB:ja (30 Nov 62)

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